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ABSTRACT

This booklet contains the reflections of a lifelong educator. It examines American education over the last 35 years and focuses on those conditions that have most influenced education in the United States. The text opens with an analysis of the family, followed by a discussion of various legislative initiatives that were intended to nurture all children by giving them equal access to health care and education. It asks whether societal values as currently construed will advance the goals of formal education. The need to establish an academic work ethic to underpin a successful school experience is emphasized, along with claims that the content of education, particularly the lack of agreement over what a high school diploma signifies, must be reconstructed so that a common education can be guaranteed. The realization that like-named courses vary widely in content and expectations must be met by imposing some type of standardization, based on a standard of excellence. Teachers should be at the center of such standards, and the public must be willing to provide funds to ensure that all students can succeed. Finally, for the future, schools must accommodate an increasingly diverse population, must reinvigorate democratic education, and must prepare students to compete in a global economy. (Contains 21 references.) (RJM)

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Education and Change: A Personal Critique

Gene I. Maeroff

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Gene L. Maeroff

Gene I. Maeroff became director of the Hechinger Institute on Education and the Media at Teachers College, Columbia University in 1997. Previously, he was a senior fellow with the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching; and before that he was the national education correspondent for the *New York Times*.

Maeroff's most recent book is *Altered Destinies: Making Life Better for Schoolchildren* (St. Martin's, 1998). He also was the editor of *Imaging Education: The Media and Schools in America* (Teachers College Press, 1998) and co-editor of *Scholarship Assessed: Evaluating the Professoriate* (Jossey-Bass, 1997).

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Education and Change: A Personal Critique

by
Gene I. Maeroff

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The chapter sponsors this fastback to honor Donald L. Adkins, former director of education and principal at Mooseheart, Ill., and an educator for more than 40 years.

Adkins joined the chapter in 1965 and has been an active member. He served as chapter president in 1973-74 and became treasurer in 1977, a position in which he still serves. Adkins has been a significant source of stability in the effectiveness of the chapter's activities for 35 years.

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A Third of a Century

When I started writing about education in 1965, revolution was in the air; but the nation's schools and colleges still bore the scent of self-satisfaction, as they had for generations. Trust in institutions, including those devoted to education, was high, and teachers and principals readily reaped the support of parents. The worst infractions still involved chewing gum in class or roaming the corridors without a hall pass. If a student's learning faltered, it was assumed to be the youngster's fault.

Yet the first fissures were appearing on the education landscape in the mid-Sixties. Sputnik already had soared into space to challenge the putative supremacy of American education, spurring a host of congressional initiatives that were supposed to set things right. Echoes of Sproul Plaza resonated faintly beyond the Bay Area, the nation's cities simmered with a rage that before long would erupt in its full fury, and the legions of women who presided over the nation's elementary and secondary school classrooms were just starting — courtesy of Betty Friedan — to think about opportuni-

ties that would soon lure their daughters and younger sisters to a host of occupations and professions previously verboten to females. Bye-bye teaching.

During the ensuing years, educators would too frequently be overwhelmed by their inability to erect a barrier at the schoolhouse door to bar the destabilizing influence of the outside world's drugs, licentiousness, family dysfunction, and lawlessness. Education would often yield to the sometimes nihilistic larger universe of which it is ineluctably a part. Early during that period, in 1970, the education editor of the *Saturday Review* (Cass 1970, pp. 61-62), was able to note, "The decade of the Sixties was a revolutionary epoch in American education. . . . The revolution came, not in the schools, but in our view of them, in our changing conception of the nature of childhood, and what society, through its schools, should do for children, rather than to them."

Thus it was that my early years as a professional observer and recorder of education, the beginning of a career that ultimately would encompass the entire last third of the 20th century, coincided with an era of societal upheaval. At the dawn of the 21st century, schools exist in a social milieu radically different from that of 1965, a Technicolor world that has eclipsed the prosaic black-and-white of that earlier era. Today the prerogatives of youth extend far beyond most boundaries that were still firmly in place in the mid-Sixties. In addition, more schools, especially in America's cities, have come to embody the frustrations and dissatisfactions that festered in unexpressed form at that time. And the nature of the education workforce has been transformed by

widened opportunities in other fields and by challenges disguised as obstacles.

The paradoxical corollary is that the process of schooling itself has altered little in response to these exogenous forces. Teaching and learning in elementary and secondary schools in the United States, despite all that has occurred these last 35 years, are in many ways not radically different from what they were in 1965. Most of the changes have been beyond the control of educators, and the changes that might have been most desirable have not occurred to anywhere near the extent to which they are needed.

Recognition of individual learning styles has increased, but efforts to accommodate those differences remain inchoate. Science before the high school level is still a hodgepodge, lacking a systematic approach that would lend coherence to the subject. Dread of both math and science by the majority of students — not to mention their parents and many of their teachers — persists unabated, mocking the goal of ranking "first in the world" by the Year 2000 in the two subjects. The blending of disciplines still is regarded as exotic, and experiential education remains captive to the doubters who fail to understand that building a boat and using it to negotiate river currents may exceed the value of the time spent at a desk in a classroom. Education does not and never has resided entirely in formal schooling; many other settings promote learning.

A new century finds elementary and secondary education caught in a time warp, Rod Serling turned upside down. The world has been upended outside the

schoolhouse; but, inside, education seems mostly mired in 1965. Knowledge transactions continue to consist largely of teachers who stand, front and center, talking at students. The Socratic method is as elusive as ever. In most classrooms the computer, for all its promise, tends to be little more than a cybernetic artifact that figures only tangentially in the core program.

All of this is not to deny that elementary and secondary education in the United States has continued during these past 35 years to prepare vast numbers of young Americans for life in the mainstream. Most learned to read somewhat competently, and some built a foundation to accomplish extraordinary deeds for themselves and for their fellow human beings. Almost all were socialized sufficiently to keep the social compact from flying apart, and most found employment — though not always to their liking. These are no small accomplishments. Through it all, public education during this last third of a century has occasionally stood on the shoulders of giants, from Frank Keppel to Doc Howe to John Goodlad to Albert Shanker to Ted Sizer. I had the good fortune to meet and write about them all.

Therefore, at the *fin-de-siècle* period of the 20th century, it is appropriate to discuss where American education has been during this last third of a century and where it appears to be headed. Education at the millennium is surely under great pressure, and teaching is more difficult than when I came onto the beat. The tremors of change since 1965 have transformed the larger society and have left the schools on shaky ground. However, education change has been excruciatingly

slow. *Plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose.* Thus in this essay I shall focus on examining the significance of change and the outlook for further change, especially changes that are likely to improve schools in the early years of the 21st century.

Discussions of school change supersede talk of school improvement, as if change automatically produces improvement. Yet improvement is far more difficult to achieve. Change can be induced by fiat, but no one has yet found a way to dictate improvement in schools. Some changes have been ill-founded — remember the New Math — and others have defied implementation. As Richard Rothstein (1998, p. 31) points out, the nature of the changes pursued should depend on whether one thinks schools are better or worse than they used to be so that myth does not lead "to trying to fix the wrong things — to focusing on nonexistent problems while perhaps ignoring the real ones."

One of the very real problems of formal education, if only because the society in which the schools are embedded has altered itself so profoundly, concerns an erosion of confidence in public schools in America. The ranks of the disgruntled cross predictable lines. Inner-city members of minority groups, generally portrayed as liberals, clamor for choice with a vehemence approaching that of conservatives who hope to see the free market establish itself in the governance of elementary and secondary schools. The stalwarts who oppose such initiatives would do well to expend greater effort not just to protect but to improve the system on which they say that the preservation of democracy depends. These are points to bear in mind:

- Families have been transformed, with all the implications that one might expect this upheaval to signify for children. Where 85% of children under the age of 18 lived in homes with two parents in 1968, only 68% of youngsters did so in 1998, according to the Bureau of the Census. In some places in the inner city, no more than two of every 10 schoolchildren lived with both biological parents. In fact, 4% of schoolchildren throughout the country lived with neither parent by 1998, most often dwelling with grandparents and, sometimes, even on their own. However, schools have been slow to revise their policies and practices to acknowledge the effects of these changes.
- Society has remade itself, but schools act as if they can serve the learning needs of students without adapting to modern times. For example, the personal computer was unknown to most Americans in the 1960s, as were the Internet, fax machines, VCRs, and cell phones. By 1998, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce (8 July 1999), computers were in 55% of Asian-American households, 46.6% of white households, 25.5% of Hispanic households, and 23.2% of black households. Those statistics show more than just the growth of personal computing. They also demonstrate that the disparities of the past were manifesting themselves in fresh ways through technology. Those with college degrees, compared with those without degrees, were eight times more likely to have computers in their homes and 16 times more likely to have Internet access at home.

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- The captive group of extraordinary women available to teaching dwindled with changing fortunes. Though the female portion of the enrollment in 1964-65 was only 4% in law schools and 7.7% in medical schools, the numbers by the 1998-99 academic year had risen to 46.1% in law schools and 42.8% in medical schools, according to the American Bar Association and the Association of American Medical Colleges.
- The course content for those high school students for whom expectations are highest rose to the point that by the late 1990s they were doing work in math and science that was the equal of what college freshmen and sophomores did in the 1960s.
- Manufacturing, once a prime source of jobs in the United States, failed to expand after the 1960s. It accounted for 29.7% of non-agricultural employment in 1965 and only 15.2% in 1997, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Correspondingly, union membership, an affiliation that usually helps protect wages and jobs, fell from 35% of the nation's workforce in the 1950s to 13.9% by the end of the century (Greenhouse 2000, p. A13).

Schools must adapt themselves to a future that will affect the inclination, ability, and need of students to learn in formal settings. The United States of 1965 was one in which only a third as many students as today were enrolled in higher education, father knew best, a woman's place was in the home, gangs were made up mainly of those who wore chains and stripes while

working at the roadside, and Dick Tracy's wrist radio — now a near-reality that will feature a tiny computer — was nothing more than a figment of Chester Gould's lively imagination. It also was a time when young people without academic credentials might still find desirable jobs, as Big Steel ruled industry and Detroit felt it could safely ignore Tokyo. Now change is in the stars. What sort of change is altogether another matter.

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The Bedrock of Family

In 1965 the nation was but a decade removed from the outlawing of school segregation. This was the year that Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, endorsing the notion that the federal government has a role to play in precollegiate education. The cornerstone of that legislation, Title I, served to affirm that Washington's aid to elementary and secondary schools, for years to come, would be a noble attempt to assist the students in greatest need. America takes this commitment for granted today, but a third of a century ago it required a grand struggle to advance such a heretical concept. The effort prepared the way for funding the education of the disabled and those without proficiency in English. This commitment raised fresh questions at the conclusion of the 1990s.

From the vantage of century's end, education policies that favor the neediest can be seen for the unfulfilled promise that they represent. Despite an infusion of $141.7 billion during 35 years of Title I, Chapter 1, and the successor names bestowed on the program, progress has been incremental — an impoverished tortoise that in this fable never catches, much less over-

takes, the affluent hare. Gaps between students from advantaged families and those from poor families remain alarmingly large.

For example, the National Assessment of Educational Progress has shown consistently that the achievement scores of black 17-year-olds rank just above those of white 13-year-olds and that Latino students perform only slightly better than black students. A book published by the Brookings Institution as the century was ending, *The Black-White Test Score Gap* (Jencks and Phillips 1998), found that despite gains by black students in the 1970s and 1980s, the gulf between the races widened after 1988, as the performance of whites rose in reading and mathematics while the achievement of black students slipped in reading and barely held in mathematics. Meanwhile, another report, this one from a task force appointed by the College Board (1999), probed "the chronically limited presence of African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans among high achieving students at all levels of the educational system." But the extent to which schools themselves bear the blame for such misfortune is less easy to assess.

What the nation sees — but does not always appreciate — in school outcomes, the phantom that blocks the progress of some children, is the pernicious impact of poverty and the life-diminishing constraints with which it is allied. Fairly accurate predictions of scores on achievement tests can still be made in the new century, as they could in the last century, on the basis of the socioeconomic/education backgrounds of the homes in which youngsters reside. Students who do best are,

overwhelmingly, at least middle-class and live with educated adults or, if not educated, adults who offer abiding support for education goals. Students who do worst, by and large, are poor and live most often with a single parent of limited education, an adult whose affirmation of schooling's primacy may be tentative at best. What makes the situation especially vexing is the fact that since the mid-1960s the portion of children living in poverty, one out of five, has not been appreciably reduced. What War on Poverty?

The assortment of ills associated with poverty constitutes an epidemic and ought to be understood as such. In the field of public health, epidemiological data indicate the prevalence of disease and a likelihood of dire outcomes. During the last couple of decades, educators have increasingly paid lip service to the plight of children they call "at risk." The logical next step in the first decade of the 2000s would involve more formal acknowledgment of the factors that place students at risk in school and a concerted campaign to counteract those forces.

One would think that this country of riches, the El Dorado of the 20th century, would by now routinely organize its schools in ways that facilitate the ability of children to overcome the known difficulties that contribute to academic failure. Yet strategies that might build social capital for the neediest students are not pursued with appropriate vigor; and agencies that might collaborate on their behalf by using schools as delivery points, or at least as brokers, of services work together far less than one might hope. Just during the

1990s, from the start of the Clinton presidency to the end of the decade, the number of American children without health insurance increased by 15.6% to a total of 11 million, the Census Bureau said.

This antiquated mode of operating schools, the product of a bootstrap mentality, threatens to persist in the new century. What is to happen when families are unable or unwilling to do what good middle-class homes do almost automatically? From where are impoverished children to obtain the array of supports that are the map, compass, and hiking boots of a student's developmental journey?

One has only to observe the benefits that children receive in some settings to appreciate what ought to happen for all. Mothers need prenatal care to increase the chances of delivering healthy babies. Infants require mental stimulation from their earliest days to fulfill the huge potential for cognitive growth that exists during the first six years of life. Children's health should be monitored and they should receive required care to ensure that physical and mental maladies do not obstruct their educational progress. The after-school hours should be safe and used to full advantage. Summers, too, ought to be a time to advance healthy development. Mentors ought to provide the savvy that the young need to navigate the system. Role models should symbolize the possibilities of favorable outcomes. A youngster should be surrounded by peers who accept and applaud the importance of scholastic attainment.

Promise resides in a renewed awareness of the school as an instrument of neighborhood improvement and of

the community as a provider of resources that will enable the school to serve needs that enhance education achievement. Efforts of this sort — as exemplified by the work of the Children's Aid Society in the schools of New York City's Washington Heights neighborhood and the Amherst Wilder Foundation's Achievement Plus program in St. Paul, Minnesota — remain few and scattered, but they are on the increase. The 21st century may mark a turning point. In the most indigent neighborhoods a true community school could make enormous contributions.

In addition, the schools are starting to extend their purview downward to embrace what the nation has until now thought of as preschoolers, those of an age not traditionally considered under the aegis of public education. It took most of a century for the public schools to open themselves to all five-year-olds by making kindergartens an unequivocal part of their mission. Now, in a similar move, momentum is building to bring four-year-olds into formal education, as New York State began doing at the end of the 1990s by adopting a program of universal prekindergarten, though, incidentally, not adequately funding it. One can only hope that it does not require another century for the inclusion of four-year-olds to spread across the country. It is clear that it will take concerted efforts during the first decade of the 2000s to pry loose funds to hire enough qualified teachers and to build sufficient classrooms to accommodate very young enrollees. Developmental opportunities too often have been squandered, like ripe fruit allowed to fall to the ground and rot.

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What Society Values

In the wake of President Clinton's much-publicized philandering in the Oval Office, it is indeed difficult to assume that the larger society will always act in ways that instill wholesome values in youngsters. When such values do not prevail, the role of schools becomes problematic. In a curious way, the President's behavior was at one with an America caught in the grip of self-centeredness. It is not only that Bill Clinton was supposed to be a role model, but that his conduct and stubborn resistance to accepting responsibility were emblematic of a solipsistic shift away from absolutes in an increasingly relativistic society. Just a third of a century ago, the protesters of Berkeley's free-speech movement were scorned for using four-letter words and Lenny Bruce was hounded into infamy for uttering the f-word on stage. Since then, television and the popular culture have lost their ability to shock and many young people hardly recognize where decorum ends and inappropriateness begins.

The school, no less than other institutions, has been transformed into a place where respect is in short supply and cynicism abounds. Learning is prized, at best, for

its instrumental value. The questions asked by students for generations reverberate today with special poignancy: "Why do we have to know this?" "What does it have to do with us?" "Will it be on the test?" The question for a new millennium is whether societal values as currently construed will advance the goals of formal education.

The hard work of learning offers little appeal amid the pursuit of instant gratification. Id bludgeons superego. The idea that schools should strive to build character or encourage an academic work ethic has become a quaint notion. Once, schools were seen as vital to this process, repositories and transmitters of values. Now educators might as well be talking about the Peloponnesian War when they discuss honesty or diligence or a host of other traits that schools once routinely promoted as fundamental to their basic mission.

Too many American teens prefer to channel their labor not into books but toward part-time employment. Some come from families desperately in need of added income, but most simply want extra spending money for designer clothes, CDs, cars, and other accouterments of conspicuous consumption. These after-school jobs, particularly when they eat up more than 20 hours a week, reduce the amount of time available for studying and cause students to yawn through their classes the next day (Kelly 1998). But this is the American way. A portion of students worked in the 1960s. But today more than one out of three youngsters are employed while they attend high school, and even some children in junior high school hold after-school jobs. Statistics gathered by the Third International Mathematics and

Science Study showed in 1998 that American high school seniors held out-of-school jobs at a far higher rate than their peers in the 20 other countries that were tested (Mullis et al. 1998, p. 120).

It would be idealistic claptrap to imagine that devotion to learning kept students of a bygone era out of the workforce. It merely was not socially acceptable nor even legal for them to hold most jobs other than baby-sitting or delivering newspapers. The nation still was savoring its victory over the grinding child labor practices that persisted well into the 1900s. Today, though, schools must compete with part-time employment and a host of other new activities that vie for the attention of teenagers. The 21st century, with virtual reality busting out all over, probably will offer even more diversions.

This trend does not bode well for attempts to raise standards, which imply a need for more time and focus on the part of students. There is no disguising the fact that much of what accounts for the performance of successful students requires them to contend with studies that are challenging and time-consuming. Will the students of the 21st century find enough hours for their books between serving customers at McDonald's? Officials in such states as Virginia and Massachusetts were already beating a retreat from the standards movement even before the old century ended, tacitly conceding that there is just so much that can be expected academically of today's students, for whom doing their own thing has become an article of faith.

During these last 35 years, it has grown fashionable to disparage self-discipline, as for example, when it is

devoted to the acquisition of facts. Yet, contrary to the beliefs of those who think that intellectual structures can be built on uninformed opinions, a knowledge base remains an essential foundation of learning. Education should not become a branch of talk radio with its all-opinions-are-equal philosophy. Those who already know are in the best position to learn more. While calculators and computers can reduce the need for memorization, students who have committed the multiplication tables to memory and have honed their powers of estimation, for instance, are more apt than others to recognize when answers that a machine yields are wrong simply because errant numbers were fed into it. This is not a plea for mindless rote learning of the sort that was properly discredited during recent decades, but a call to recognize that the "construction" of knowledge by students depends on their possessing certain building materials. Even one of the three pigs discovered you cannot erect a formidable structure from straw.

Teachers today who want to make a compelling case for the pursuit of knowledge recognize to their dismay that glitz — not intellect — earns the greatest admiration. Athletes and entertainers, the nation's demi-gods, monopolize America's pedestals. Educators, scientists, and government leaders seldom win such admiration. Where have you gone Ted Hesburgh, Albert Schweitzer, and Ralph Bunche? Anti-intellectualism resides deep in American soil and now, as if to verify this, the culture of celebrity prevails, burying all else.

Some hard-nosed critics maintain that schools have merely to dispense information and that students bear

the responsibility to learn it. This is true, at best, in higher education, where enrollment is voluntary. But precollegiate education will have to pay more attention in coming years to nurturing attitudes favorable to learning. This is the precursor without which the education enterprise will wither. Schools, like it or not, must compete for the minds of a plugged-in, electronics-bred generation with an attention span sometimes measured in nanoseconds. These are young people who are being raised with a belief, inculcated by growing portions of the media, that even the news must be suffused by amusement. Half of them have television sets and CD players in their bedrooms and 58% say that television plays during their meals (Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation 1999, pp. 13, 15). Contemplation? That's for monks.

An academic work ethic has been and will continue to be a *sine qua non* of a successful school experience for most students who excel. Where this ethic does not flower as an outgrowth of family life and out-of-school experiences, educators must conspire to plant the seeds. For example, in San Diego and other school districts around the country a program called AVID, Advancement Via Individual Determination, teaches students how to take notes and how to organize themselves for effective learning. Such deliberate attempts to cultivate habits of the mind can make learning a more productive pursuit. Attitudes of students and teachers, after all, shape the atmosphere for learning in a school building.

The Content of an Education

A student in most jurisdictions in 1965 could receive a high school diploma having taken no more than a year of mathematics, a year of science, a couple of years of social studies, and two or three years of whatever fell under the rubric of "English." No longer. Requirements have been ratcheted up to increase the number of years that students must spend in these subjects. By the mid-1990s, the percent of students completing four years of English and three years each of social studies, science, and mathematics was 57% for Asian Americans, 54% for whites, 45% for blacks, and 44% for Hispanics and American Indians (Center on Education Policy 1998).

While the education of many students has been fortified by these added requirements, an extra year or two of a subject has had limited significance for some others because the courses — regardless of their titles — represent diluted versions of what reformers had in mind. Transcripts recording the course-taking of these students can look like fun-house mirrors that offer a distorted reflection of students' academic experiences. Moreover, this has happened within a high school curriculum that has been stretched to a taut parody of its former self so

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as to include all manner of electives, allowing many students to evade substance.

A group of researchers at the University of Minnesota found that one out of five high school mathematics courses were general math (Davenport et al. 1998, p. 497), which may comprise such high-level thinking as balancing checking accounts and figuring out the cost of financing a car. Granted that some of these classes were for the learning disabled, there is still the problem that in too many instances the second or third year of various subjects has not encompassed content that would deepen the education of students. The diploma, in these instances, becomes a hoax, a chimera whose imposing façade turns out to be a fantastical illusion.

The new century seems destined to continue as the last one: Some students will gain dominion over knowledge and advance toward rewarding lives and others will be so bereft of knowledge, whether or not they have diplomas, that doors to opportunity and prosperity will slam shut all around them. With due apologies to Gertrude Stein, a diploma is not a diploma is not a diploma. In other words, the nation's high school graduates have little in common in terms of the content of their education. Despite the advent of content standards, students do not take courses of equal rigor. Parents send youngsters to schools in Kokomo, Kalamazoo, and Kankakee without any sense that shared content standards might serve their mutual interest. Forget about the labels on courses.

What the diploma represents differs from student to student, even in the same school, and this is more true

today than it was 35 years ago, in an era before electives spread like a computer virus through the curriculum. "Each fall," said a report titled *Ticket to Nowhere* (Education Trust 1999), "thousands of high school graduates and their parents are shattered to learn that the high school diploma they collected the previous June is not quite what they thought it would be. Instead of a ticket to college or work, that diploma is, at best, a ticket . . . back to high school."

For all the obeisance to the importance of completing high school, there is an appalling lack of agreement about just what a diploma ought to signify. Surveys of the public reveal mainly a desire for students to learn the basics, avoid misconduct, and respect authority (Cuban 1998, p. 70), hardly objectives on which to build an education for the competitive years of the 21st century. What should it mean, for example, to spend three years in social studies? Just what should a youngster learn about the history of his or her own country by the time of high school completion? Or about the cultures of other countries? Which other countries? These questions merely hint at the quandary. Yet the idea of a national examination that reflects a more or less common curriculum, as exists in most countries of the world, is regarded in some circles as akin to a plot to take away the vote.

Taking enriched courses would most benefit the students who until now have received the most impoverished content, those who attend schools in the nation's poorest neighborhoods. They deserve something better; and without this sort of enrichment, they

will, like salmon swimming against the tide, continue to struggle to move into the mainstream. But the schools must exercise care as they pursue these loftier goals.

Some critics would merely have the schools impose stiffer retention policies, as if promotion alone were the Holy Grail, the search for which would motivate youngsters who lack the support structure that makes success possible. Furthermore, how much advantage will youngsters derive from repeating a grade if schools are not reorganized to lend them the reinforcement they need to escape the levels of academic mediocrity that have been all that they have known?

More demanding content must be accompanied by the introduction of such supports as tutoring, mentoring, extended school days, and summer programs that heighten students' ability to cope with the material. Offering more substantial content is but the first step in a process that requires far-reaching changes in the ways that teaching and learning are carried out and supported.

Some educators have spent these last 35 years at each others' throats disagreeing over how to teach students, rather than discussing what youngsters should know. These disputes remain unresolved at century's end — phonics versus whole language, math facts versus math concepts, bilingual education versus immersion. The middle ground scarcely seems to exist for some who have joined the fray. How is a baffled public to sort out issues of content and pedagogy when educators are so divided? On the other hand, consensus has been reached on some instructional questions during the last third of a century, leading to such advances as hands-on science

and process writing. The National Science Foundation and the National Writing Project exemplify the agencies that not only changed but improved schooling during the past 35 years.

Despite differences over the substance of a high school education, at least the schools prepare their graduates to go directly into the job market, if that is the choice of the youngsters. Right? Not always. Look at what employers in New York City said in 1998 when asked by Public Agenda to rate students' preparation for jobs. Fair or poor ratings (as opposed to good or excellent ratings) were given to 89% in grammar and spelling, 88% in writing ability, 81% in math skills, 82% in their ability to speak English, and 74% in their work habits (Johnson et al. 1998, p. 9).

Figures from *Education Week*'s "Quality Counts 2000" show that the new century begins with 44 states having developed content standards in the core subjects, a laudable bit of progress. But it has not been without a kind of academic triage. The arts are struggling for a proper place in a curriculum that seems to have forgotten that music and dance, theater and film, painting and sculpture are noble expressions of the human spirit. Youngsters, no less than adults, have varying interests and aptitudes. Those who find their métier in the arts should have outlets in a curriculum that does not deny them their chance to discover scholastic fulfillment. New York City, which had one of the better arts programs in its school system until near-bankruptcy in the middle-1970s, epitomizes the sad state of arts education. The arts were stripped from the curriculum when money got tight, as happened

in many other districts, as well. Not until the late 1990s did supporters of arts education begin to catch a glimpse of what may turn out to be their phoenix. One can only hope that these stirrings are the harbinger of a rebirth of arts education in New York City and elsewhere.

And what about other goals that ought to be reflected in a well-rounded curriculum? For example, students should emerge from schooling ready to take up civic obligations, able to empathize with one another, and knowing how to make fruitful use of leisure time. Some judge these objectives as soft and less important than other parts of the curriculum. What sort of country will this become, though, if young people of the 21st century shun civic responsibility, find themselves unable to get along with members of other ethnic groups, and do not develop leisure pursuits more meaningful than watching situation comedies and sports on television?

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Expecting and Getting the Best — Or the Worst

A study produced in Massachusetts in 1998 captured its 15 minutes of media fame because it included several school districts that enrolled predominantly poor students with low test scores among the 35 school systems in the state that were hailed as most effective (Hart 1998). The poor districts got on the list because their scores were higher than what the students were expected to achieve, given their impoverished backgrounds.

Certainly any performance that exceeds what might otherwise be expected is encouraging. Progress is a vital step along the continuum that leads students to levels that would allow them to become fully participating members of society. But a list of effective school systems that contains districts in which, despite improvement, students continue to lag seriously below satisfactory levels should serve to remind everyone of the seriousness of the issue of low expectations. I still think about the schools I visited for the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching during my research in the late 1980s. In these schools the handful of students at or

near grade level were grouped together in what they were told were "honors" courses.

Low expectations are a bane of public education. Students shortchange themselves when they settle for less than they are capable of accomplishing. By the time they reach secondary school, all too many of them, like starlings near a jet engine, are sucked into a syndrome of low achievement. A treaty system has evolved, as so aptly described in *The Shopping Mall High School* (Powell et al. 1985), allowing teachers to make insufficient demands on some students in exchange for the students' tacit agreement not to hassle the teachers. Sometimes the practice of tracking students into low-level classes cements them into a pattern of preordained mediocrity. This is how it has been through most of the time that I have covered education, and I regret to observe that low expectations probably helped boost the high school graduation rate during this last third of a century.

The proliferation of remedial education at colleges and universities since the 1960s is evidence of low expectations. It is understandable when immigrants require a grounding in the English language in order to embark on college studies, but that phenomenon accounts for just a portion of college remediation. Half of the new freshmen at the 22 campuses of California State University qualified for remedial courses in the fall of 1997 (Olszewski and Hamburg 1998). There undoubtedly were students in higher education 35 years ago who could have benefited from remedial education, but the problem increased along with the college enrollment.

Just look at what happened at the City University of New York. School systems around the country simply have not asked enough of students who were under the mistaken impression that they were preparing themselves for college or, at least, for gainful employment. The debate should be less about whether such students belong in higher education and more about how to prevent what went wrong before they got there.

The greatest impact of any article I ever wrote came from a piece on the front-page of the *New York Times* in the mid-1970s in which I revealed that SAT scores had been falling for 10 years. Neither the College Board nor the Educational Testing Service, the two organizations behind the SAT, had taken official note of this phenomenon. Until then, the public paid little heed to average scores on the SAT — which had not yet been raised to its exalted status as education's Cross of Gold — and no reporter had bothered examining trends in scores on the test. The College Board eventually appointed a blue-ribbon commission to examine the reasons for the drop in scores, an occurrence that was attributed to factors ranging from atomic testing to the birth-order of children. The decline continued into the 1980s, setting the stage in 1983 for the U.S. Department of Education to issue *A Nation at Risk*, a hyperbolic manifesto that was a harbinger for many of the changes, of mixed effects, advocated during the remaining 17 years of the century.

I can't help interjecting here my disappointment that higher education has not more aggressively sought to strengthen elementary and secondary schools, thereby

lessening the need for remedial education. When I wrote *School and College* (1983) almost two decades ago, I documented some notable collaborations — such as the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute and Middle College High School — that leveraged the efforts of precollegiate education and higher education.

Programs of this sort have proliferated, but still their effect remains limited, hampered principally by policies at colleges and universities that do not reward and may even penalize faculty members who involve themselves with elementary and secondary schools. The remediation issue seems like logical ground for collaboration; but at the outset of the 21st century, schools and colleges still circle different suns. The incentives affecting appointment, promotion, and tenure in higher education continue to eschew academicians who put their expertise to use in elementary and secondary schools.

The push for greater accountability that was gaining momentum at the end of the 1990s may eventually fuel the engine of higher expectations and perhaps evoke greater involvement by colleges in assisting elementary and secondary schools. Accountability is mentioned at all levels of education more today than it was a generation or two ago, but it still remains only a slogan in many places. Moreover, holding only students accountable will not be sufficient in the new century. Accountability also must have resounding implications for these various groups:

- Mothers and fathers who take parenthood seriously and reinforce the education of their children;

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- Taxpayers who provide the schools with the resources they need; and
- Educators who, despite the shortcomings of the rest of society, avoid excuses and use their potential to make a genuine impact on the learning of students.

This allocation of accountability reflects and acknowledges the education research of the last 35 years. During this period findings have underscored the importance to scholastic achievement of a child living in a supportive home, where cognitive, emotional, and social development are as fundamental as the meals that are set on the table. Taxpayers, after watching the fiscal restraints imposed by ballots in California and Massachusetts, must finally recognize that schooling on the cheap will all too often be as substandard as building construction in which contractors try to cut corners. And educators have to be aware of findings that attest to the difference that able, dedicated teachers and principals can make in the lives of students, however deprived those students may be.

Assessment, properly used in connection with accountability, should be not only a summation of what students know and are able to do, but also a formative mechanism for improving instruction and learning. Progress in the assessment arena during these last few decades has revolved around the development of new forms of testing that let students perform tasks and assemble portfolios of their work. But too many Americans want to use assessment primarily as a gauge for meting out punishments. After all these many years the nation remains fixated on norm-referenced, standard-

ized examinations that deliver predictable messages about life's winners and losers. The schools face the challenge in the early years of the new century of reconciling the very real need for accountability with the desirability of doing away with gratuitous comparisons.

Education at the millennium must deliver the message of achievement to more students, sounding a tocsin unmistakable in the urgency of its call. The truth is that in spite of the performance of the highest achievers, the majority of students in American high schools say they do not try very hard in school (Johnson and Farkas 1997, p. 19). Some young people strive because they want to attend highly selective colleges and they know that their chances of gaining admission dim with each low mark they receive. They have been prodded, by and large, by intrinsic motivation, marching to a drummer whose beat is unheard by classmates. Many others, even if they want to go to college, sense the fact that the overwhelming majority of higher education institutions exercise virtually no selectivity and accept almost anyone who applies. This is not a suggestion to limit access so much as it is a plea to do a better job of impressing on students that scholastic complacency may in the long run leave them as adults who are less than the sum of their parts.

Teachers: What's New?

Teachers were embracing collective bargaining with a passion in my early years on the education beat. A tall, dour math teacher in New York City was winning a reputation as a no-holds-barred battler in behalf of unionization. His name was Albert Shanker and, under the aegis of the AFL-CIO, he was leading teachers across a smoky battlefield still studded with scars left in previous decades by armies of autoworkers, truck drivers, and coal miners. Meanwhile, the National Education Association (NEA), far larger than Mr. Shanker's American Federation of Teachers (AFT), looked suspiciously on organized labor, proclaiming that teachers — despite their puny salaries and undignified treatment — were professionals who had no business walking a picket line.

Oh, how things changed. Little did I realize that I was arriving on the scene as a chronicler of education just as teachers were about to gain unprecedented power. The last third of the 20th century, especially the period from 1965 to 1985, marked the ascendancy of organized teachers. Now, as the new century starts, reformers find that the shift in power sometimes makes school change problematic. Even as Mr. Shanker began talking about

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reform in the mid-1980s, repositioning himself to be perceived as a kind of elder statesman of education, leaders of local collective bargaining units across the country were resisting many of the same initiatives that their national president appeared to be endorsing. Over at the NEA, which shed its genteel ways to transform itself into an organization every bit as militant as the AFT, recalcitrance was a similar motif.

Certainly teachers had every right finally to flex their long-atrophied muscles. Like Charles Atlas, they were fed up with having sand kicked in their faces. Now, though, teachers — especially those who have won bargaining rights — should start thinking more about how they can exert a greater portion of their new-found influence in behalf of students. Without such a shift in approach, school improvement may falter in the 21st century and public education itself may be in jeopardy.

To be sure, teachers should be wary of risking their hard-won gains, but they ought to look at conditions today through fresh lenses that allow them to see the situation for what it is. Negotiated contracts have raised the salaries of teachers in many districts to respectable levels, though this is less true in big-city school systems and in states that have been able to forestall collective bargaining. However, veteran teachers in many suburban districts are paid on a par with most of the taxpayers who make those salaries possible, receiving annual compensation of $55,000, $65,000, $75,000, and even more, and enjoying vacation schedules and defined-benefit pensions far exceeding what most college graduates receive in the private sector.

School improvement will require a reconsideration of the ways that schools operate. Yet at the opening of a new century, teacher unions continue to try to have it both ways, describing their members as professionals while insisting on labor contract provisions more appropriate for pipe fitters than for people who need to show flexibility in their work arrangements to carry out their mission properly. The whole notion of closing elementary and secondary schools during the summer and sending teachers home is an anachronism, a vestige of a rural society that disappeared along with tens of thousands of family farms. Reconfigured school calendars are essential to provide students with tutoring, academic reinforcement, and make-up time. Students, particularly the impoverished, need to use late afternoons and the summer months more productively. And some revisions are needed in contracts that now reward the most experienced teachers by allowing them to avoid assignments to the most difficult schools, where their expertise is most needed.

Curriculum planning and professional development also could benefit from instituting the same kind of 12-month work calendars for teachers as the rest of the workforce follows. If teachers are going to help create the schools the nation needs, as indeed they should, then they must devote part of their time, including summers, to writing the curricula that they are expected to teach and planning the lessons, alone and in teams.

What I find indisputable after 35 years of observing schools is that teachers of quality are the single most important ingredient without which the education stew

cannot attain a four-star rating. School improvement depends above all on the ability of teachers to implement the changes that are needed. Ninety percent of Americans responding to a poll by Louis Harris and Associates in 1998 identified a well-qualified teacher as the most important element in improving student learning, even ahead of a challenging curriculum, strict discipline, reduced class size, and school uniforms (Archibold 1998). Attempts to strengthen instruction are doomed and the success of students is placed at peril when teachers lack the skills and knowledge that the job requires.

Perhaps the most promising trend involving teachers at the outset of the new century is the growing recognition of the importance of better professional development. Too often during these last 35 years professional development — or "inservice education," as it has been known in the inimitable jargon of educators — was a waste of time, pursued mainly to justify climbing the steps of an arbitrary salary schedule. The professional development of veteran teachers has finally been recognized as a crucial link in the chain of teaching and learning. An enriched curriculum can be taught only by people prepared for the task.

Initial preparation for classroom duties also has come under greater scrutiny. The ability of teachers to work effectively is to a great extent a function of their own education. Disagreements over the form and substance of teacher education have broken into the open. The quality and accreditation of institutions of higher education that train teachers for their entrance into the classroom have become topics of debate. However, it remains

to be seen whether this spate of attention will lead to teaching in the 21st century that is markedly better than teaching was at the end of the 20th century. Most four-year colleges have teacher preparation programs, and those institutions that resist improving their programs may be able to hold out indefinitely. Teacher certification in many states still has not gone very much beyond an automatic procedure that is triggered by the granting of degree. Where examinations have been introduced to make the process less than automatic, the validity of the tests sometimes becomes a matter of as much contention as the quality of teachers, as occurred in Massachusetts in 1998.

Any discussion of the role of teachers in school improvement also should take cognizance of former teachers — the ones who occupy principals' offices throughout the country. With teachers moving into the spotlight, the focus has shifted away from principals and the central role they must play in lifting the quality of education. But leadership and adept management by principals cannot be taken for granted. Early attempts at improving schools in the 1970s, including the work of Ronald Edmonds, noted the importance of principals. But by the late 1990s the role of the principal was less visible in pronouncements on school improvement and the literature spoke of everyone in the school as a leader, marginalizing principals. Able principals, not to mention superintendents, will be needed more than ever as schools wrestle with the issues that the new century is pushing to the fore.

Money and What the Schools Get for It

Few observers at the outset of my career thought to take note of the startling disparities that allowed one school district to spend two or three times the amount on each pupil as another district spent. It was accepted as a virtual act of God, akin to some people being born with brown eyes and others with blue eyes, that government would devote unequal sums to children in different school systems. These continuing inequities are caused in most states by a policy of financing elementary and secondary education largely through property taxes that remain under local control. Thus the main way that residents of a property-poor school system can try to offset its geographical disadvantage is by inflicting disproportionately heavy property taxes on themselves, a sort of altruistic masochism. And even after taxing themselves at a rate two or three times as high as another district, the taxpayers in the poorer locale still may not generate as much revenue per pupil as the more advantaged district.

During the 1970s, though, some states were forced by a series of lawsuits to confront these practices. Those of us covering education during this era wrote of the

Rodriguez case in Texas, the *Serrano* case in California, the *Levittown* case in New York, and the *Abbott* case in New Jersey, among the many suits brought to introduce greater fairness in school finance. Yet the rest of the 20th century was not long enough to erase the differences and wipe the slate clean for a fresh start. The 21st century starts with many school finance inequities still as firmly in place as the football field that adjoins each suburban high school.

This is not to say that state legislatures across the country have entirely ignored the disparities. In some states school finance reforms have taken hold. Many states provide extra allocations to the districts in greatest need in order to render the inequities a little less egregious. Moreover, federal aid is distributed mainly through categories that channel the money to the neediest children, though Washington's contribution amounts to less than 7% of the more than $350 billion that the country spends annually on elementary and secondary education.

The question at this juncture is, How far into another century will the nation travel without addressing the basic unfairness of school finance in the various states, which under the U.S. Constitution are tacitly left with final authority for education? Legislatures during the last third of the 1900s proved about as eager to supersede local school districts on the funding issue as they were to allow high schools to distribute condoms. The shibboleth of "local control" is mouthed in defense of an arrangement that continues to be unjust. (Isn't it fascinating how some lawmakers want to defer to local

control except when women's bodies or people's bedrooms are involved?)

By perpetuating a system that lavishes its greatest rewards on the "haves," the states, in effect, tacitly tell the most hard-pressed districts that they must improve on the cheap. Surely school improvement has some connection to the availability of adequate funds. Students who are economically disadvantaged almost certainly need more money spent on their education than do those from affluent homes. Among other matters, added funds are required for tutors, after-school and Saturday activities, excursions, summer programs, and parent education. This is a society that easily sees that golfers can compete equally only when "handicaps" are computed into their scores but does not so readily recognize when the playing field is uneven for schoolchildren.

As inequities in school finance got more attention in the last 15 or 20 years, debates arose over whether money makes a difference in education. The controversy continues into the 2000s. Money may, in fact, be ill-spent in education, just as it may in buying shoddy houses, defective electronics products, and fly-by-night penny stocks. Every additional dollar bestowed on the schools does not necessarily provide greater value. Districts such as Newark, Washington, D.C., and Hartford ranked among the highest-spending in the country in the 1990s on a per-pupil basis without bringing distinction to their education programs. Students in these cities languished. It is clear to me after 35 years of watching schools go about their business that money is no guarantor of excellence, which is not to say that it cannot have an effect if properly targeted.

Consider the campaign that was waged in the final years of the 1990s to reduce class size, an optimistic effort undertaken in the face of a voluminous body of research that left questions remaining about the circumstances under which smaller classes may promote more learning. California, under a mandate from the governor to cut kindergarten, first-, and second-grade class size to 20 pupils, quickly discovered that without adequate facilities for more classes and without proper training for newly hired teachers, the smaller classes might amount to an exercise in futility. It may prove productive in coming years, rather than arguing in the abstract about class size, for discussants to concentrate on identifying those situations in which money is most likely to make a difference. On the other hand, if money made no difference at all, people of means would not gravitate toward such costly redoubts as Winnetka, Illinois; Newton, Massachusetts; Fairfax County, Virginia; Greenwich, Connecticut; and Chappaqua, New York.

The expenditures that seemed beyond discussion during the last quarter of the century, after the passage of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act, were those directed toward students suffering a wide assortment of disabilities. Budgets soared almost everywhere as federal regulations and the interpretations of federal courts dictated the expenditures of local school systems in behalf of the disabled. I first wrote about this legislation in 1975, as it was quietly — unnoticed by most of the education community — wending its way through the 94th Congress. Lawmakers, and even policymakers,

gave scant consideration to the effect that the law and companion legislation would ultimately have on school spending.

Little did they realize that by the last year of the 20th century, the U.S. Supreme Court would affirm, in an Iowa case, that a local school district had to bear the cost for at least one and maybe two full-time aides for a child with a severed spinal cord. This youngster required a ventilator just to breathe, as well as regular suctioning of his tracheotomy tube and urinary catheterization. What such expenses mean in terms of the availability of funds for the rest of the students has not been a factor in decisions of the courts, which say they are simply following a congressional mandate. Where, oh where, have good intentions taken us? The onset of the 21st century ought to be a time to restore the balance by recognizing reasonable limits to what the federal government demands of school systems in regard to the disabled.

In the 21st Century

Schools stand poised at the beginning of the 2000s to play a key role in helping to resolve some of the country's most pressing debates. The schools, in effect, have become a stage on which some of the great national dramas are already playing themselves out. The denouement of each will go a long way toward determining the type of society that will exist in the United States during the 21st century. Overly dramatic? Not necessarily so. These issues, which are intertwined, already confront the schools:

1. Whether the country orients itself toward accommodating peacefully and productively a more diverse population in its mainstream or loses its sense of nationhood.
2. Whether the country provides an economic stake for all or splinters irrevocably into two nations — one of haves and one of have-nots.
3. Whether democratic institutions retain their vitality or wither into insignificance.
4. Whether the American economy can compete globally or sputters in the face of international pressures.

1. In the most romantic of notions, American schools have been melting pots in which, even if the cultures of separate groups did not dissolve, the ingredients mingled and added to the flavor of each other as people learned to live together and cooperate for the common good. This vision was always somewhat out of kilter with reality; many children attended schools primarily with their own kind. But in the larger picture it bore some authenticity and, collectively, the public schools tended to acculturate young people to American ideals. Public Agenda reported in 1998 that 97% of American parents agreed that "our country is very diverse and kids need to learn to get along with people from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds" (Farkas and Johnson 1998, p. 14).

One must wonder about the prospects for this function of schools continuing if the trend of the late 1990s accelerates and tuition tax credits, vouchers, and other vehicles favoring privatization of education allow increasing numbers of families to opt out of public schools. As it is, schoolchildren of non-European extraction — Hindus and Muslims, Haitians and Chinese, for instance — form a growing portion of the enrollment in the United States. During the new century these youngsters, along with Latinos and African Americans, who have long been on the scene but only recently came into their own, will constitute the majority in school systems across the land.

These demographic shifts will occur at a time when the very existence of public education is apt to encounter challenges unknown during the past two generations.

The role of the public schools in nation-building will be revisited in the early years of the 21st century, just as happened at the beginning of the 20th century, when the United States received a massive influx of immigrants. It will be incumbent on the public schools to help the young Americans of an increasingly diverse country learn to live together. The lesson of the Balkans, which in the 1990s etched a grim chapter in world history, must be recognized for the warning that it represents for other diverse societies.

2. Schooling goes a long way toward predicting one's potential for living a satisfying and rewarding life. For much of the 20th century, the nation's elementary and secondary schools provided the socialization and learning that helped millions of Americans settle into the middle class. The education system of the 2000s must be strong enough to allow students to garner what they will need for fruitful employment and personal fulfillment in an economy that, one hopes, will be expansive enough to accommodate a huge portion of the population.

Schooling, no matter how well carried out in the classroom, must ultimately have some connection to the kind of life that a person will be able to live at the end of the process. Otherwise, why bother? The nation itself will be placed at risk if schools cannot function as engines of upward mobility. Parents must have confidence that the education system will equip their children for a bright future. If the schools and the agencies that collaborate with them are not able to continue performing this magic, then the United States, as surely as fifth

grade follows fourth, is destined for a schism the likes of which it has never seen.

There already are hints of disquieting trends that, left unchecked, could undermine the contributions of education. During the last two decades of the 20th century a relatively small part of the population in the United States reaped huge financial gains, out of all proportion to what their countrymen received. Members of this elite group, fortunate enough to be in the right place at the right time, received incomes of several million dollars a year, while others, many as smart and as hard-working, struggled to escape corporate downsizing and personal debt. Figures from the Congressional Budget Office, as analyzed by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, showed that the richest 2.7 million Americans in 1999 had as many after-tax dollars to spend as the bottom 100 million had. This ratio had doubled since 1977. Meanwhile, the annual income of the middle class, adjusted for inflation, was actually less in 1999 than what it had been in 1989. Even schooling is no longer a demarcation of these differences, because educated people can be found on both sides of the divide. If this situation persists, more and more Americans will wonder about the rewards of formal education no matter how well the schools perform. The promise of a payoff for hard work in the classroom will ring hollow if the disparities are seen basically as facilitating an irrational prize for a favored few. The America of the 21st century could split into a nation of haves and have-nots, including educated have-nots.

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3. Both of these first two issues will affect the third, the question of whether democratic institutions can retain their vitality. The nature of the response to the challenges of diversity and the extent to which economic disparities insert a wedge in society will either increase or decrease cynicism. As academic standards are put in place and expectations rise during the first decade of the new century, it would be an error to overlook the part that schools can and should play in imbuing students with a sense of civic responsibility, a goal not ranked high on most standards agendas. Families, of course, also should help convey these understandings; but the role of the school is pivotal because education possesses the power to counter the inclination of people to retreat into ethnic, racial, and economic enclaves. The educational mission must include the imparting of knowledge and attitudes that encourage and enable young people to participate in democratic institutions and to appreciate the virtues of freedom. It can be as simple as believing in the power of the ballot or valuing the First Amendment.

Civic betterment depends on the exercise of personal responsibility. This credo must be acquired somewhere if it is to flower among a populace. The birth of democracy in the former Soviet Union has been arrested by, among other factors, a lack of understanding about the role that individuals must play in bringing such a society of shared interests into being and in preserving it. A heritage of despotism and dependency has left a generation of people in Russia ill-equipped for democracy. The schools must be the lead institutions in ensuring that this does not happen in the United States of the 21st century.

But no matter how willing they are to accept a civic role and no matter how much they appreciate liberty, the allegiance of young people to democratic ideals may be severely tested by how well the schools and society respond to the first two issues — the threat of further economic polarization and the challenge of diversity. In the 21st century, democracy could come to be regarded as no more than a Potemkin village of pretty façades and empty promises for members of minority groups who encounter prejudice and for Americans of all ethnic backgrounds who feel trapped on an economic treadmill.

4. Finally, education for a global economy requires that schools prepare students to compete for jobs against unseen rivals who might live half a world away. American products and services will be in demand abroad, but this does not necessarily translate into creating enough good jobs on American soil. For example, the computer and the Internet already enable some insurance companies in the United States to hire employees in Ireland and other English-speaking countries to process claims. This is a trend that can only accelerate as such practices spread from industry to industry. Whatever else happens to the curriculum of the 21st century, one can expect that technology will occupy a place of growing importance. Students who emerge from schools without the attitudes and skills to handle jobs dependent on technology will be cut off from an important sector of the economy. It would have taken a Jules Verne in 1965 to conjure up a vision of what computers and the accompanying tech-

nology would make possible even before the end of the 1900s, not to mention by 2010 or 2025.

The existence of an interdependent, multinational economy also means that Americans can forget about most of the low-wage manufacturing jobs that for much of the 20th century were a source of livelihood for a large portion of the nation. Few companies will set up or even keep open manufacturing plants in the United States when they can hire hungry people in Honduras or Romania or Indonesia to toil at a fraction of the pay that an American would receive. Service positions — janitors, hairdressers, clerks, and the like — will continue to grow fastest in the United States; but a standards-based American education system should lead to more options than these.

Schools in the 21st century will have to figure out ways to adjust and readjust so that they can turn out graduates for employment in a rapidly changing economy that will be subject to worldwide vicissitudes. The challenge exceeds any that formal education has known until now. In meeting this challenge, schools will have to take on some of the attributes of multinational corporations that continually reinvent themselves. But during the last third of a century, schools and colleges have sometimes been downright sclerotic when asked to change. Such a luxury could prove fatal to the employment prospects of their graduates in the 21st century.

During these last 35 years, schools have been buffeted by fads, disputes, and downright whimsy. Methods of

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reading and math instruction have passed through one incarnation after another. Subjects have been added to and subtracted from the curriculum. For better or for worse, the social studies have absorbed history. Foreign languages have fallen from grace. (They say that Latin is making a comeback, but this is probably hyperbole.) Racially segregated school systems, de rigueur throughout the South for more than half the 20th century, have been abolished — only to be replaced, both South and North, by de facto segregated school systems. Schools have gone from decentralization to centralization, to decentralization, and back to centralization. New York City's vast school system spent the last 30 years of the century chewing up and spitting out chancellor after chancellor, vivid testimony to the deep-seated troubles that came to afflict most of the nation's urban districts during this period.

The swing of the pendulum does more than keep time in American schools. Education fashions, attitudes, and practices sometimes bounce right back to where they started. Through it all, public education has endured. Now, having made it to a new century, the beleaguered public schools face challenges no less daunting than those encountered by the schools of 1900, a century and a world apart from today. Yet, schools in the United States have, collectively, shown an uncanny survival instinct while doing much to celebrate and contribute to America's greatness. As always, the future will not be easy. But what happens in the schools will have import beyond all estimation.

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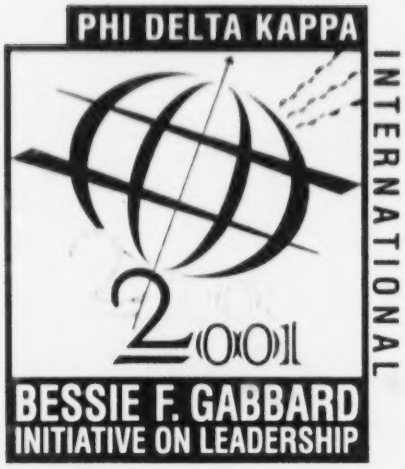

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The Bessie F. Gabbard Initiative on Leadership in Education for the 21st Century, dubbed the 2000-2001 Celebration for short, reaffirms the central importance of the Phi Delta Kappa tenet of leadership. Bessie F. Gabbard, the "First Lady" of PDK and a member and longtime chair of the board of governors of the Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, provided the impetus for this initiative, which will focus the energies of PDK members and staff during the two years of transition to the new millennium. During this 2000-2001 Celebration, special attention will be paid to leaders and leadership in education with a particular focus on PDK's traditional advocacy on behalf of the public schools.

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The little guy gets a friendly push in this playground scene from October 1923.

Courtesy of the Cleveland Public Library Photograph Collection.